

Fort Des Moines Historic Complex,
Buildings 55 and 56
(Double Barracks)
Des Moines
Polk County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-121-F

HABS
IOWA,
77 DESMO.
24-F-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

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Building Nos. 55-56. Double Barracks

Located on the south side of the parade ground, near the southeast corner, this two-story structure of Classical Revival style was completed on September 29, 1903, costing \$59,806.94. Of brick joined in running bond using red-pigmented mortar, it rested on a rusticated limestone foundation, had a slate roof, and conformed to the Quartermaster General's standard plan 75g for a double barrack unit for 200 enlisted men. The main building measures 71 feet 8 inches by 39 feet 4 inches. Two wings each measure 39 feet 4 inches by 103 feet 4 inches.

The main building connects the two wings. On its front was a two-tiered porch with roof supported by turned columns. Metal railings connected the columns. Entrances at either level were adjacent to the wings, and the doors were paneled and had transoms. All doorways and window openings have segmental arches. Windows have plain lug sills. On each level are six double hung windows each containing 2-over-2 lights. Basement windows are of the hopper type with three lights each. A stairway with railing once led from the ground to the lower level porch. The rear of the main building had a similar two-tiered porch, as well as identical windows at each level. Two additional doors were on the lower level. Each of the wings continued the porch in front, but not in the rear. The east and west sides of the structure each contain seventeen 2-over-2 light double hung windows, nine on the upper level and eight on the lower, besides a door leading to the basement. Five cellar windows, some with light wells, and two coal chutes punctuate the foundation walls on the east and west sides. On the courtyard side are ten double hung windows, five on each level, plus five cellar windows. A single tier porch with boxed, wood columns supporting the roof stands on the rear of each wing. Brick piers support the porch. Fire escapes are located on the courtyard side of each wing. The main building's ridged roof contains four corbeled chimneys, while that of each wing contains one chimney and two ventilators. At the front of the wings the

roof has returned eaves. Palladian windows are in the gables. Four-light attic windows are in the rear (south) gables. A parapet fire wall divides the two sections at the center of the main building. Gutting and downspouts are of iron.

The floor space above the basement totals 13,440 square feet. Each half of the building was arranged as follows:

Basement:

Cellar, 33' 1" x 36' 3" (including store room and coal bin)
Lavatory, 32' 9" x 36' 3"
Boiler room, 32' 9" x 36' 3" (including coal bin)
Hall, 11' 7" x 36'
Cellar, 23' 6" x 36'

First floor:

Mess room, 33' 1" x 36' 10"
Dormitory, 33' 2" x 38' 6"
Hall and Vestibule, 11' 7" x 36' 8"
Sergeant's room, 11' 7" x 16' 4"
Store room, 8' 4" x 11' 6"
Tailor shop, 11' 10" x 11' 6"
Company Office, 11' 7" x 19' 10"
NCO room, 11' 6" x 15' 4"
Cook's room, 10' 7" x 11' 10"
Pantry, 10' 7" x 11' 10"
Kitchen, 22' 3" x 36' 10"

Second floor:

Dormitory, 36' 10" x 100' 10"
Hall, 11' 7" x 16' 4"
Barber shop, 11' 6" x 16' 4"
NCO room, 11' 7" x 16' 4"
Day room, 19' 10" x 36'

Attic:

Room, 36' 10" x 100' 10"
Room, 36' 8" x 37'

During the latter stages of World War I and after, the double barracks served as Hospital Wards Nos. 11 and 12.

The interior of the double barracks is plastered over wood laths and has wooden floors. A rounded cornice exists where the ceiling meets the walls in the large dormitory rooms. An 8-inch baseboard runs along the foot of the walls. The ceiling has rounded floor girders running the length of the building and supported by steel pipe columns placed 11 feet 3 inches apart. (No. 55 has boxed rather than rounded roof girders in the upstairs rooms.) Fire doors connect the interiors of the barracks at the back and front. The rear rooms have wainscoting. A banister with large paneled post at the lower end runs to the second level. It consists of turned balusters and a wooden hand rail. Basement windows are hopper style with coped sills, and there is a fire door near the front of the building in the basement.

Steam radiators furnished the heat in Building Nos. 55-56, and electricity was provided. Repairs to the structure between 1903 and 1922 averaged \$267 per year. In 1928 and 1929 extensive plumbing was completed costing \$650.00. On December 18, 1928, the east half of the structure, constituting Building No. 55, was severely damaged by fire. Repairs totaling \$23,806.00 and consisting of a complete reconstruction of the interior, were finished by mid-September, 1929. Moulstone flooring was installed in the barracks the following month. Other significant modifications included the extension of the fire walls and insulation added around the chimneys, the replacement of attic wiring and the addition of heaters therein, the removal of several boilers, and the installation of an automatic furnace stoker, all between 1931 and 1937.

A number of further changes have occurred to Buildings Nos. 55-56 to affect their overall integrity. All porches have long since been removed except those at the rear of the wings, and they are presently deteriorating. The interiors show extensive modification, including the addition of a suspended acoustical ceiling with fluorescent lighting. A cinder block wall has been added in the basement near the front, and on the second level a celotex wall dividing the dormitory room has been installed. Asphalt floor tile was added throughout the structure years ago.

Building No. 55 served as an administrative facility when Fort Des Moines became a reception center in 1941. The barracks were used by the army reserve during the early 1980s, but now both are vacant.(20)

20. Card for Building Nos. 55-56. "Historical Record of Buildings." NA, RG 77, Box 51. Plan, "Two Co. Barrack," No. 75G, April, 1902, 9 sheets. NA, RG 77. Cartographic Archives Division; Brigadier General E.E. Booth to the Chief of Staff, January 16, 1929. NA, R94. Central Files, 1926-39, Box No. 2998. Lieutenant Colonel V.L. Padgett to the Inspector General, December, 1941. NA, RG 407. Project Decimal File, 1940-45. Military Posts and Reservations, Box No. 4425; Field survey notes, February 20-22, 1987.